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"The Show Must Go On!" But Where?: The Use of American Sign Language Interpretation in the Theater

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Abstract

American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting for theatre has three main placements of interpreters: platform interpreting, zone interpreting, and shadow interpreting. Each of these placements has its own positive and negative aspects, depending on the type of play and the scenic design. This will be addressed through a survey, literature review of articles, journals, and blogs. The final result will be the creation of an educational guidebook for directors and theatre companies about the various forms of interpretation. The intent is to provide a way to easily compare and contrast the placements according to different theatrical production demands. Other demands addressed will include the effects each placement has on audience members, the production team, and the theatre company. Some other aspects include the demands on the interpreters themselves with respect to prep-work, time spent in rehearsals, and production needs. Although this thesis will not be able to address every decision that goes into providing access for interpreted performances, it can be used to initiate the discussion by being a conversation starter for directors and theatre companies about the placement of interpreters, and the best match for their production. If successful, the findings can be applied to different theatres, productions, and even concerts. To improve both the Deaf consumer’s and the hearing consumer experiences.

Keywords: American Sign Language, Interpretation, Deaf, Theatre, Theatrical Interpretation, Platform interpreting, Zone interpreting, Shadow interpreting

Introduction

From classic Greek tragedies like *Agamemnon*, to modern musicals like *Dear Evan Hansen* and *Hamilton: An American Musical* theatre has been a vital part of society. The appeal of the theatre has not diminished from society, so why then should it be more difficult for some people than others to enjoy the centuries-old art of theatre? Those in the Deaf community have found their way through a hearing world for as long as there has been language, though how they have done this has changed dramatically over the years. With the establishment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 it became easier for those in the United States who are Deaf to have access to previously inaccessible events, including the theatre (National Association of the Deaf, n.d.). Since the ADA access has become easier to obtain and there has been a growth of knowledge regarding access. One example connecting to the world of interpretation in the theatre can provide varying degrees of benefit to the Deaf audience depending on its implementation. In theatrical interpretation, it is most common to have one, two, or even three interpreters placed in an off-stage platform or separated area, where the interpretation is performed (Gebron, 2000; Rocks, 2011). While this might be the easiest option for the theatre company, and the least intrusive to the theatrical performance itself, this can create a "Ping-Pong effect", and thus a disadvantage for the Deaf audience (Gebron, 2000). There are other, lesser-known placements for interpreting which will also be analyzed and discussed to examine and better understand placements in theatre.

This author's personal interest in this topic grew from an interest in ASL, which lead to studies at a university leading to an ASL/English interpreting degree. While attending high school the author began an involvement and passion for theatre through becoming a theatre technician. During this time, the high school provided ASL interpretation for one its theatre productions with the help of seniors in the ASL program at the school. The author's attendance at one of these shows greatly helped develop an interest in this field. Years later, upon entering the interpreting program at the author's university and with a few years' experience as a sound designer in theatre productions, the author began to pursue a combined interest in both theatre and interpreting. This led to a new awareness of placement possibilities for interpreters in theatre which extended beyond the common platform placement. While writing a research paper, the author began to research and grow an understanding of these different placements. Additionally, during this university experience, the author attended the productions of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Romeo + Juliet* (both in Seattle). Both of these shows starred Joshua Castile, a Deaf actor, while in *Romeo + Juliet*, there was another Deaf actor, Howie Seago. Both shows utilized other actors – sometimes on-stage and sometimes just off-stage – to provide a voice for the Deaf actor. However *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* utilized Mr. Castile's voice to a much greater extent than *Romeo + Juliet*. Both shows were able to provide new ideas and new understandings of the opportunities for interpretation for the Deaf which are

examined in this thesis. Even though the inclusion of Deaf actor’s in a production is not a feature of this thesis, it is another step toward merging the Deaf and hearing customer’s experience.

Terminology

Before beginning an in-depth look at the different placements of interpreters, some terminology related to theatre and interpreting that needs addressing. Firstly, theatre stages come in many different formats. The classic and most common of which is a proscenium stage. This is a stage in which backstage activity is concealed by an arch which frames the action taking place on stage, and creates a clear separation between it and the audience. Secondly, a thrust stage is similar to a proscenium stage, but instead of a clear separation between audience and action, this stage thrusts into the seating area and is surrounded by the audience on three sides. Thirdly, an arena stage, also called a theatre-in-the-round or simply in-the-round, is a stage surrounded by audience on all four sides. Lastly, a black-box theatre takes place in a rectangular room with no fixed seating or stage area. Which allows for a variety of seating or staging options. Additionally, black-box shows often provide a more intimate feeling between audience and action (Cohen, 2014).

There are also many important people involved in a production who are not view by the audience. These include the director, the stage manager, the light designer, the costume designer, production team, technicians and crew, and the production director.

The director, in American terminology, is the person responsible for the overall unity of the production, and for coordinating the efforts of the contributing artists (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). The director is in charge of rehearsals and supervises the performers in the preparation of their parts (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). The stage manager is in control of the performance. Some responsibilities of the stage manager include, calling actors to rehearsal, note all rehearsal needs, and work the running of the show through called cues through radio headsets that coordinate the technicians and, through them, the actors. Stage managers – often abbreviated as SM – are helped by an assistant stage manager to whom they delegate responsibility (Thorne, 2008). The lighting designer is responsible for the design of the production lighting and effects. They also prepare and produce the drawings and schedules required for the lighting equipment. Lighting designers also direct the focusing, supervise the programming, and oversee all artistic elements of the lighting design until the opening of the production (Mort, 2015). The costume designer chooses the particular and appropriate attire for a circumstance and era (Hodge, 1988). The production team often includes the producer, director, and production manager. The design team (including the artistic team) work alongside the director to design the production’s aesthetics, including set, costume, lighting, and sound (Mort, 2015). Technicians run the lights, sound, and other special-effects equipment. The term technicians is often shortened to tech or techs (Stren & Gold, 2017). The word “crew” refers to the backstage team assisting in putting on a

production (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). Finally, the production director oversees the budgeting, scheduling, and other resource allocations for the production as well as scheduling and use of rehearsal space (Ionazzi, 1992).

Blocking is the planned movement on a stage of all actors, including entrances, exits, and movement among fellow actors (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). There are six movements that occur on stage; upstage, down stage, stage right, stage left, exits, and entrances. Upstage means at or toward the back of the stage, away from the front edge or audience. Downstage is the opposite of upstage, meaning the front of a stage or toward the audience (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). Side to side movements include left stage (also called stage left) and the right stage (or stage right) which are both from the point of view of an actor facing the audience (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). Exits are the action of a performer leaving the stage and entrances are the actions of a performer coming onto the stage (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). House is the term for the area in which the audience is seated (Stern & Gold, 2017). Stage left and right are opposite from house left and house right. Therefore, house right and house left are the area of the stage that the audience perceives as the right and left side respectively (Mort, 2015).

There are a few technical terms that are used in the theatre. Plays are divided into structural units called scenes (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). The term acting area is used to describe the stage space which is divided to help determine blocking (Wilson &

Goldfarb, 1991). Backstage is the area beyond the setting including wings (an on stage area blocked from the audience sight by the use of curtains or set pieces) and dressing rooms, this is commonly where the crew can be found (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). Props (or properties) are objects used by performers onstage or otherwise necessary in a scene. Sightlines are the eye view from the audience members which are positioned in the seats at the extreme points within a theatre’s auditorium. This often includes the balcony seats, gallery seats at the back, and the front seats on the right or left of the house (Thorne, 2008). The terms sightline, and off stage are often used together. Off stage areas are defined as those which are not in view of the audience and are commonly the wings, left or right off stage areas, or backstage (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). Sets are scenery for a scene that can be different for each scene or can be the same for the entire play (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991).

The pre-production of a show includes aspects such as auditions, monologue, rehearsal, light hang, light focus, light plot, tech week, and cue to cue. Audition or auditioning is a tryout performance before the producers (those who attain what is needed to make theatre happen), directors, casting directors (who are in charge of choosing the cast), or others for the purpose of obtaining a part in a production; may be acting, singing, or dancing (Stern & Gold, 2017). Monologue, often used in auditions, is a long, unbroken speech in a play, however, if a monologue is addressed only to the audience it is called a soliloquy (Cohen, 2014). Rehearsal is the cast’s preparation for

the performance through repetition and practice and is similar in concept to the term “practice” as used by sport teams (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). The term light hang is used to define the installation or refocus of lighting instruments, however, this term can also be shortened to as hang (as in “to hang a show”). Light focus, correlating to light hang, is the adjustment of the position, size, shape, and focus of the beam of light projected from a lighting instrument or fixture. Light plot is a plan of the stage and auditorium showing the lighting bars and layout of all socket and connection points and numbers. This is used to record the position and type of lighting instruments as well as any color or effects for that instrument. Dimmers, meaning what controls the intensity of an individual fixture, and other necessary information are addressed on lighting plots (Mort, 2015). Tech week is known as the week or more of rehearsals leading up to the opening of a production, introducing and perfecting necessary technical aspects. Tech week includes paper tech, dry techs, cue-to-cues, technical rehearsals, and dress rehearsals. Paper tech is a meeting between the director, designers, and stage management to define and record the series of technical events required to operate the production. Dry tech is a technical rehearsal without actors to establish technical needs. Technical rehearsals are the rehearsal or series of rehearsals in which the technical elements of the show are integrated with the word of the actors, also called tech. Dress rehearsals are the final rehearsals before a production opens, and will at this point incorporate costumes (Ionazzi, 1992). Finally, cue-to-cue is a rehearsal in which large

stretches of dialogue without light or sound cues are skipped. Actors begin scenes by deliver the line of dialogue predetermined as a “warning” line and continuing the scene through the line after the predetermined “go” cue line. These rehearsals may also include lines before and after special effects, quick costume changes, and prop handling problem and set changes (Stern & Gold, 2017). A cue is any prearranged signal that indicates to a performer or stage manager that it is time to proceed to the next line or action. Cue sheets, are a prompt book marked with cues, or a list of cues for use by technicians, especially the stage manager (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991).

Some theatrical interpreting terms include team, character development, throwing focus, and sign coach. A team is typically two interpreters working together, and sometimes more than two depending on the situation (Hoza, 2010). Character development, or characterization, is a process similar to what actors or actresses undertake in which interpreters become familiar with the character they will be portraying by developing how their character will talk and their overall motive and special attention is given to the actor’s choices in how they portray the character’s appearance, stance, and personality (Gebron, 2000). Throwing focus occurs when interpreters direct the Deaf audience’s attention away from the interpreters and to the stage. This allows the audience’s focus to be on an important action, special effect, set change, magic, or striking stage moment. This is often done by the interpreters returning to a neutral body pose, interpreters looking at the stage, and sometimes,

(more often in the case of children’s theatre) telling the audience to shift their eye gaze to the stage (Gebron, 2000). Finally, a sign coach is one or two individuals (most commonly Deaf) whose involvement in a theatrical production is to oversee and advise the translation process and interpretation. (Berson, 2019.) Other terms with similar concepts are ASL master and ASL captain.

Finally, it is important to address the adoption of the current custom between Deaf and deaf as used in this thesis. As Nomeland et. al. (2012) states, “the current custom to distinguish between the cultural and audiological representation of deaf people by using the capital “D” to refer to a community of people who share a language and a culture and the lower case “d” to refer to the audiological condition of hearing loss” (p. 3).

Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the different placement of theatrical interpretation, focusing on platform, zone, and shadow interpreting, as well as briefly exploring simultaneous communication, commonly known as SimCom (Buchwald, 2015). This thesis will examine the advantages and disadvantages of the different placements when applied to the theatre company, the interpreter themselves, and the audience members (both Deaf and hearing). This thesis will focus on the following three questions.

RQ: How does the interpreter’s location affect Deaf and hearing audience?

RQ: How does the interpreter’s location affect the theatre company's rehearsal time and pre-show work?

RQ: How does the interpreter’s location affect the interpreter’s prep-work?

Literature Review

Having a theatrical production interpreted into a signed language, whether American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL), or any other type of signed language, creates many opportunities and many complications (Gebron, 2000). Due to the relative newness of the field of professional sign language interpreting, there is little research available. The literature and collected data for this study are a combination of peer-reviewed articles, books, blogs, and transcripts of survey questions. In American theatrical productions, interpretation has three main placements; platform, zone, and shadow interpreting (Baker-Gibbs, 2014; Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn 2007). Other placements that are less commonly seen in large theatres are sightline interpreting, modified zone, using Deaf actors while having the English interpretation available to hearing audience members, double stage, and SimCom (Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Richardson, 2017). This thesis will briefly explore SimCom and Deaf actors as well as the three main placements.

Interpreter’s Location and its effects on the Deaf audience and hearing audience

Placement is everything when it comes to a visual language, for example, if someone is Deaf and they cannot see what is being signed, they will not know what has

been said (Rocks, 2011). When discussing the different locations for interpreters during shows, is beneficial to understand the importance of access for the Deaf community. It is also beneficial to consider the hearing audience as they will be affected by the interpreter placement (Frishberg, 1990; Rocks, 2011). This thesis will focus mainly on the Deaf theatre goers and their experience, however, it is important to note that often the decisions made regarding accommodations are influenced by the familiarity that directors have with the hearing and sighted world. The vast majority of directors are hearing and sighted, and most audience members are also hearing and sighted, resulting in shows which are produced with this type of audience in mind. It is from this understanding and familiarity that the need to have accommodation has developed. If directors were to learn to consider the need to these special accommodations, of non-hearing and non-sighted people, the theatre would be more open to the various communities.

During a platform interpretation, the interpreters are placed in a solitary location off-stage either sitting or standing. This is the most common placement because it is the least distracting to the hearing audience. When the interpreters are placed off-stage, they are not intruding on the action on stage (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000). One benefit to the hearing audience with this placement are that it is not as likely to draw their attention away from the show’s action. The interpreters are most commonly placed far stage-right or far stage-left with the Deaf audience seated in that section.

The benefits of this placement for the Deaf audience is that this is inexpensive and easy which makes many theatres susceptible to utilizing this and thus allowing Deaf audience members to go see theatre in their language (sometimes at a discounted price) (Baker-Gibbs, 2014). The disadvantage of this placement to the Deaf audience is that they are not able to watch the action on stage and receive the auditory information at the same time resulting in a loss of understanding (Richardson, 2017). Having to look back and forth between the interpreters to the side of the stage and back to the stage is called the “ping-pong” effect. When confronted with this dilemma interpreters can minimize the shortfalls of this placement by “throwing focus” to the stage which cues the Deaf audience to know that there is something important happening on stage (Gebron, 2000; Granz Horwitz, 2014; Rocks, 2011). On occasion, if permissible by the set and the director, it is possible to place the interpreters in a position on stage but still separate and unaffected by the actors. This is possible if there is a section or area of the set that is not used or is blocked by the actors, providing a window for the interpreters to work on set. While this is likely to help minimize the “ping-pong” effect, this is not commonly possible.

Zone interpretation is when the interpreter or interpreters are each placed in one location on the stage, commonly far stage-right, far stage-left, or far up-stage to stay out of the way of the actors as they go through their blocking (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000). The advantage for the Deaf audience is that the interpreters are closer to the

action on stage so the “ping-pong” effect is lessened (Frishberg, 1990). However, the disadvantages of this placement is that an interpreter only interprets for any actor who enters their “zone”. If an actor moves across the stage in the middle of a monologue then the interpretation would transfer to the other interpreter as soon as the actor enters the new zone. This can create some confusion (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). Another complication is the result in a split view for the Deaf audience, causing another “ping-pong” effect when the interpreters are placed on either side of the stage full of actors, are splitting the lines and end up both signing (Gebron, 2000). This forces the Deaf audience to look at both sides of the stage to understand what is being said. Furthermore, if the stage is full of actors and there are only two interpreters, this split view could result in confusion as to who is talking during what time.

Shadow interpreting is done with one or more interpreters shadowing actors throughout the whole show and doing everything their actor does (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). This allows the interpreters to be as close as possible to the action on stage, however shadow interpreting can be the most distracting to hearing audiences as it places the interpreter right in the middle of the action. Hearing audience members could see this placement as a distraction from the production, but others might prefer for this placement as it adds an additional element to the production. This allows Deaf audiences to see the production done in a way that does not force them to choose between action and dialogue and allows the Deaf

audience to see the show as the designers and production members wanted it to be seen. The designers and producers are not relying on the presentation of the show according to the interpreter. The disadvantage is that if there are multiple people on stage at once, the interpreters must sign for them all which could result in the Deaf audience not knowing who is saying what, similar to zone interpreting (Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007).

One other style of interpretation that is occasionally used is SimCom, which is when Deaf and/or hearing actors talk and sign at the same time, or when a Deaf cast member signs while a hearing person speaks the role. This method, with a combination of shadow interpreting and captioning, was used in DeafWest's *Spring Awakening* and *Big River*, and a production of *West Side Story* in Illinois (Baker-Gibbs, 2014; Brewer, 2002; Calhoun et al., 2015). While this method is similar to shadow interpreting in that it allows Deaf audiences to enjoy the action and the dialogue at once without needing to look elsewhere for interpreters, it has some complications. The main disadvantage is that because of the differences in the languages the dominant language of the actor will most likely influence the grammatical structure of their non-dominant language which does not do either language justice (Buchwald, 2015). One solution to this could be to have a Deaf cast member and a hearing cast member for one role and have them each using their native language. This placement was one of the language choices used in *5th Avenue's* production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. This production used a

combination of spoken language, SimCom, and a Deaf actor with a hearing actor singing the lines. It also incorporated the assistance of platform interpreters on access nights.

Interpreter location and its effects on Theater Company

The choice of where to place interpreters is, in reality, made by the director of the show and the theatre company itself (Frishberg, 1990). When making this decision it is most likely that their focus will be based on cost, the time needed to spend with the interpreter, layout of the set and its effect on the interpretation, and if their goal is to add another element to a production or provide access for a designated night. Platform interpreting is a commonly chosen interpreter location because of its ease of placement with respect to the theatre company and production team. It is simple from the theatre’s perspective because it does not require a substantial amount of time working with the interpreter and it does not affect the show’s blocking. It is easier to place the interpreters in a platform position if the director and Theatre Company have the goal to provide access for a night rather than for an extended period of the show. Most commonly, interpreters will only need the script before-hand, attend a few run-throughs, dress rehearsals, and possibly other performances, to practice and fine-tune an interpretation (Gebron, 2000). For platform interpreting the theatre provides the interpreters with a copy of the script and possibly a complimentary ticket to the show or rehearsal, in order for the interpreter to see the vision of the director, take note of any important plot elements, test out their translation, practice character switches, and

practice timing (Gebron, 2000; Granz Horwitz, 2014; Turner & Pollitt, 2002). Additional thought must be given to the lighting (commonly only a single white light) to ensure that the interpreters are illuminated (Gebron, 2000). Blackening the interpreter's light at appropriate times must also be taken into consideration, if there is no dialogue happening, to assist with throwing focus to the action that on stage.

Using zone interpreting or shadow interpreting for a production is more complicated and costly for the production team and theatre company. Zone interpreting is the middle ground between platform and shadow interpreting for a production. Zone interpreting is more costly to the theatre, due to the extended hours required for an interpreter who might need to attend a few dress rehearsals in order to practice their blocking with the actors (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000). Zone interpreting also can be influenced by the set layout for a show. If a set does not provide much space for an interpreter, or block slight lines to the interpreter and therefore blocking accessibility, then a different style might need to be considered (Brewer, 2002). The main difference between zone interpreting and platform interpreting placed on the stage (as mentioned above) is that the interpreters would most likely be in different areas of the set, and would be interacting with different actors, rarely at the same time. Zone interpreting is similar to platform interpreting but it is possible that more extensive lighting effects must be considered. Due to the interpreters being placed on the stage where there are already preassigned lights for

the actors on stage, additional lights might not need to be set up. The use of a pre-existing light might be able to be used for the interpreter as well. However, if the interpreters are placed in an area in which no action was going to take place, a new light or two might need to be added, or the focus adjusted, in order to include the interpreters. Whether or not additional lights are added, taking out the interpreting light at appropriate times might still need to occur, which can affect the light design for the show.

Shadow interpreting is the most costly interpreter placement for a theatre and the most work for the production team and interpreters. A shadow interpreted performance commonly requires the interpreters to attend many, if not all, rehearsals throughout the entire production process. The interpreter must work with the production team to ensure that lighting, costuming, and blocking are all considered (Brewer, 2002; Calhoun, et al., 2015; Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000). It is also possible to cast the interpreter in the show as a character who has no lines, but this has the possibility of affecting costuming. It must be determined if the interpreter is to wear modern clothes with contrasting colors to their skin color or if an interpreter is to be dressed in clothing appropriate to the time and setting of the production itself. Both options must be taken into consideration by the director and the production team. When a combination of shadow interpreting and SimCom interpreting are used by actors, or interpreters, signing or speaking for other actors it does not usually affect

rehearsal time requirements. However this can affect cost for a theatre company because it usually results in a double cast, one hearing actor and one Deaf actor for a single role (Baker-Gibbs, 2014; Brewer, 2002; Bunchwald, 2017; Calhoun et al., 2015).

Interpreter’s location and its effects on prep-work

While it is difficult to accurately measure the amount of prep-work an interpreter does for a job, it is easier to note when a considerably larger amount of time is required. For platform interpreting, one must consider the time for the translation process of the script. Additionally, an interpreter commonly spends time with their team seeing the performance or rehearsals, to work on timing or their translation, or just meeting with their team to divide lines and work on translation (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Granz Horwitz, 2014). Rehearsal time is also beneficial for interpreters to develop an idea of the different characters and learn how the actors choose to portray them. When properly done, the interpreters personify each character the same way the actors do.

When producing a zone interpreted show the amount of time spent for a platform interpreted show must be added to the additional time needed to asses blocking and character division. The script division might look different for this interpreter placement to ensure that there are not strict divides either by scene or by characters. Instead, the interpreters might need to know all the characters and all the scenes, so that as that character walks into the interpreter’s zone, they can portray that character true to the actor’s vision. One factor to take into consideration when

interpreting using zoning placement, is that the blocking of character is likely to change even in the last dress rehearsal (Gebron, 2000).

Finally, prep-work for a shadow interpreted show requires extra time for the interpreter. In addition to the translation, teamwork, and development of characters needed for interpreting a theatrical production, shadow interpreting has a few other requirements. A shadow interpreted show requires the interpreter to attend many rehearsals, work with the director, lighting technicians, costume designers, and stage manager throughout the production of the show (Baker-Gibbs, 2014; Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). This can result in a much long prep-work time for the interpreter and require time be set aside for the additional rehearsals and any meets that interpreter might need to attend. If possible and if needs be, interpreters might be asked to also attend tech week and possibly cue-to-cue rehearsals.

Methodology

This research began as only a literature review for a class in the ASL/English Interpreting Program. As the author began to look for scholarly articles directly pertaining to this topic it became apparent that there was a lack of literature available. After a few months of struggling to find further information with which to build a strong discussion and comparison, the author made the decision to change to a survey. This decision was made with appropriate permission from the Institutional Review Board

(IRB) and with support from the author's advisors Sarah Hewlett and Dr. Gavin Keulks. In addition to the survey and literature, the author included personal observations from the performance from Seattle's 5th Avenue Theatre's production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and Act Theatre's production of *Romeo + Juliet*, both with Deaf actor Joshua Castile.

Participants

The focus group of these surveys was on those who identified as Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing and those who work as theatre directors or other theatre workers. There was a discussion between the author and advisor in the early stages of creating this survey about whether or not sign language interpreters should be included in the pool of participants. The final decision was to not include them in the sharing of the questionnaire unless an interpreter was a Deaf interpreter.

This decision on why interpreters should or should not be included was not done lightly and had many aspects taken into consideration. The final decision was made due to the desire for the results of the survey to focus more on the ideals of those who are most affected by the decision of interpreter placement. While interpreters are affected by the amount of prep work and hours placed into a show, dependent on placement, the interpreters are not often, if at all, included in the decision process of where they will be placed. Additionally, while the interpreters might receive feedback from the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing community based on their placement, this entire process is

focused on the accessibility of those in the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing community. The final decision to not including the interpreting community allowed this thesis to focus on the participants who are most involved with the selection and decision making of the interpreter placement and those who were most affected by it.

Participants were chosen only with respect to the ease of ability of contact through the author and the author’s acquaintances. The author shared the survey with those whom they knew might identify with the intended participants. It was shared mostly with the ASL and Theatre departments at the university as well as the Interpreter department and current Interpreting program senior cohort. The survey was also shared, with the encouragement from the author, with others who identified with the intended participants. An obvious limitation that must be taken into consideration is that both cultures and communities for the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing and theatre workers are a small community in comparison to the whole of the population. Additionally, due to the size of the communities, sharing of information and resources is limited to the knowledge of those who are in a nearby location and those who might be acquaintances. In addition to the small sizes of these communities, there is a further reduction that must be made by only taking into account those members of the community who attend theatre or who work with sign language interpreters in their productions.

Data Collection

The data collected from the survey was primarily yes/no questions with the addition of multiple choice and short answer responses. The survey was created as a result of many different influences. Some questions were generated from ideas found during the literature review process. Other questions were generated from the curiosities of the author and advisor as a result of experience or observations. A few questions were inspired by the author’s review of previous undergraduate theses written. All of these sources combined, impacted the production of the survey used for this thesis.

In September of 2018, the decision to create a survey for the thesis was discussed between the thesis advisors and the author, with the knowledge that it would need IRB approval. Between many emails and a few meetings, the author was able to submit a questions list, identifications of risks, consent form, and other required information to the IRB for approval at the end of October. After modifications and resubmissions the survey was approved and able to begin sharing at the end of December. In March, due to very few responses, the survey was once again shared with the same people as a gentle reminder. It was also shared with a new batch of people in the hope of obtaining more responses. On April 6th, the survey was once again examined for responses and the count increased to five. After consideration and discussion with advisors and a review of the IRB description and approval, it was decided to change the use of the

survey from being a critical factor in the thesis to being a support for the ideas and understanding of different people on interpreter placement.

The survey was conducted through a Google survey and consisted of three total sections. Of these, participants were only allowed to see and respond to two sections. The survey was shared by the use of an online link attached to a consent form which included possible risks. This form was shared via email to the appropriate people. Some limitations of this survey include only being able to share the survey with those known to the author, or with the acquaintances of the author.

Risks, as stated in the survey implied consent form, include being identified through location, due to the minority status and limited numbers of those in the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community, the act of generalization due to multiple responses, and the inability to specify personal experiences. Additionally, the exclusion of groups of people and ideas by excluding surveying those in the interpreting community itself was also a risk. To maintain confidentiality all responses remained anonymous once received, and locations were generalized to large areas of the United States to avoid specifying a group of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community.

The data will be analyzed first in an open coding format. After the initial review of the responses, the yes/no responses and multiple choice questions will then be color coded and placed into pie charts or graphs to evaluate response percentages. The short response questions will then be analyzed as quantitative data using an inferential

analysis, focusing on correlations between the responses and ideas found in the literature review, as well as correlations between the short answers themselves.

Summary

Due to the short time frame in which data was being collected and the small size of the communities being pooled, there are very few responses. This results in lower than desired representation of the knowledge and awareness of the communities. While this questionnaire does not contain enough information to provide a good argument for or against interpreter placement, it is included in this thesis to represent and show the varying ideas and understandings from the involved communities. With all of these aspects being taken into consideration, it is important to state that these are the ideas and understandings of a minute few of a greater population. Also, the nature of surveys and self-reporting means that the results and comments should not be considered as representative of any population community, but instead as the individual’s experiences and the opinions of those who took the time to participate in this research.

Survey Analysis and Results

The first section of this survey helped categorize responders in regards to age, geographical location, and then categorized responders as Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theatregoer or Director/Theatre Worker. Depending on the response to the last question of the first section, the participant would then be directed to one of two

secondary surveys. The Director/Theatre Worker survey focused more on the responder’s background and knowledge on the topic of theatrical interpreting. The first question was to further expand on the individual’s background and how long they’d been involved in theatre. The Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing survey expanded more on the individual’s background and identity as well as experience with interpreters in general. After this, the questions continued to focus on the participant’s experience with theatrical interpreting. The participants will be identified as Participant #1 through #5 with respect to the order in which they responded.

Survey 1

All participants were required to respond to the three questions in the first section. The first two questions inquired about age and location to determine if location or age would influence data results. The final question of this section has two options with respect to how the participants identify; Director/Work in theatre or Deaf/Hard of Hearing theatregoer. Accordingly, the participant were then transferred to a second set of questions one for those who identified as directors/theatre workers and another for those who identified as Deaf/Hard of Hearing theatregoers.

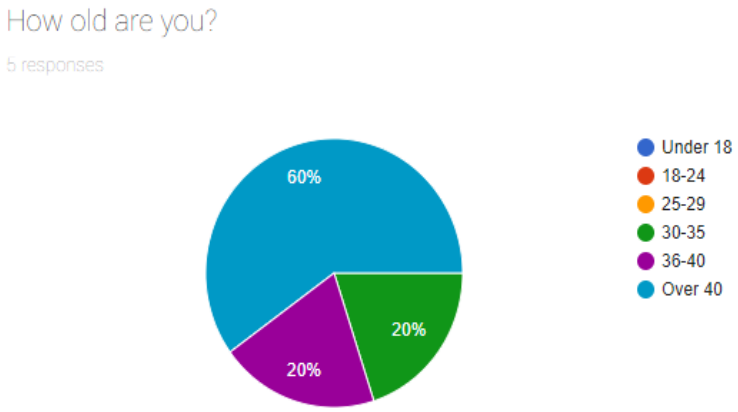

Figure 1: Age span of participants.

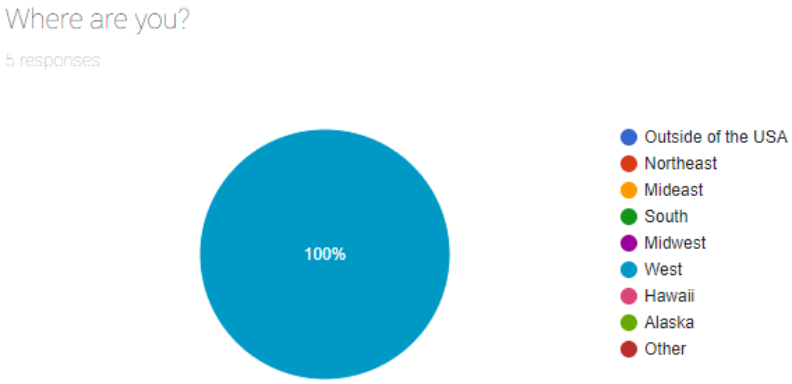

Figure 2: Location range of participants.

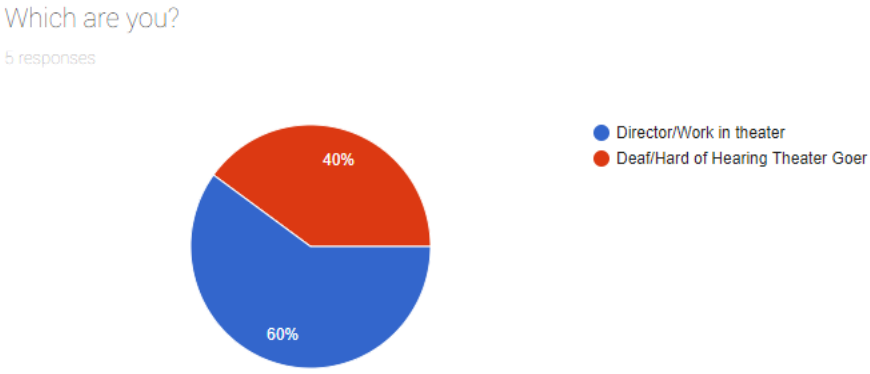

Figure 3: Whether the participants identify as Director/work in theater or are Deaf/Hard of Hearing theater goer.

Reviewing the results from the first few responses it is not too surprising to find that 60% of the participants are 40+ years of age with 20% of the participants being 36-40 and 30-35 years of age (see Figure 1). Additionally, it was not surprising to find that all the participants (100%) live in the Western area of the United States (see Figure 2). This was unsurprising as it reflects the people that the author was able to contact when sharing the survey. Most of them were contacts at the university or the author’s acquaintances. Additionally, due to the lack of time in which the survey was available, the author is not surprised that the survey was unable to travel far to colleagues or distant acquaintances.

The next question results were used for two main reasons (see Figure 3). The first was to identify the percentages of who, in the participation group, identified as being a Director/working in a theatre (60%) or were Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theatregoer (40%). This was helpful in knowing how many people the survey was able to reach and the demographics of those who would be participating. The other main reason for this response was to then direct the participants to the list of questions specific for their group choice. When analyzing the data, the author is slightly surprised and at the same time not surprised, by the results. The surprise came because there was a hope that more members of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing community would participate whereas the results say the opposite. In contrast, the author is not surprised by the imbalance because the author knows that the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing community is smaller than

that of the theatre community. More than that, the author knows that there was a greater delay of sharing the survey with the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing community than with the theatre community.

Director/Theater Worker

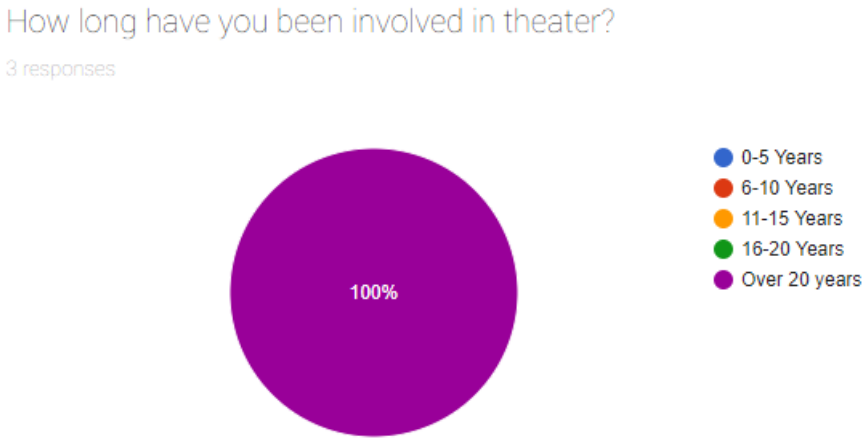

Figure 4: How long the Director/theater worker participants been involved with theater.

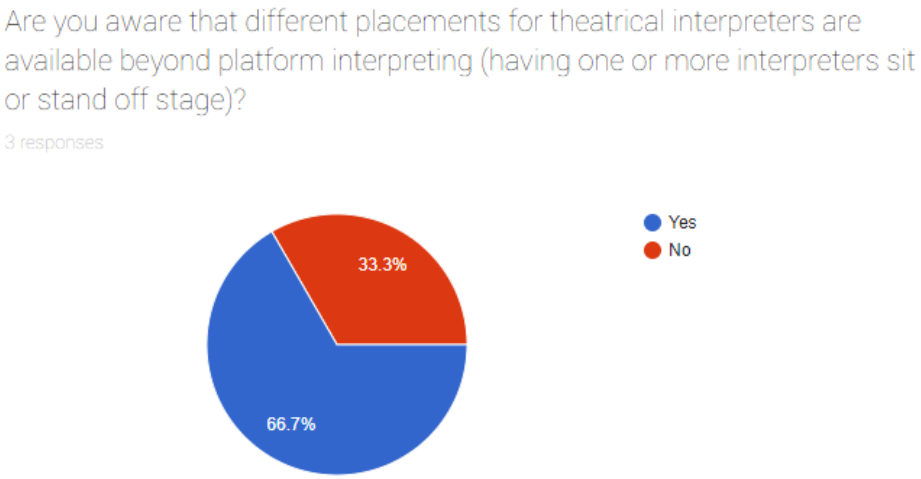

Figure 5: Awareness of different placements for theatrical interpreters for those participants who are Directors/theater workers.

Once the participants were separated into their separate surveys, the questions began to focus more on the participant’s personal experience with theatrical interpretation. Participants #1, #2, and #4 completed this section of the survey. The first two questions of this section were multiple choice to obtain a basic understanding of each participant’s experience with theatrical interpreting. The first question was to obtain an understanding of how many years the participant has been involved in theatre (see Figure 4). All of the participants (100%) have been involved in theatre for over 20 years, which correlated nicely with the previous answer that stated that most (60%) of the participants were over the age of 40. While there were some participants younger than 40, it is not unheard of for people to begin theatre experience at quite a young age. In the author’s experience, most theatre people start being involved in theatre in High School or even Middle School/Junior High.

The second question of this section is where the survey really shifts from overall information about the participants to more focused information on their experiences. The second question of this section was created to obtain an idea of how much exposure the participants have had to the focus of this thesis. The question asked the participants if they were aware of different placements for interpreters beyond the common placement of platform interpreting (see Figure 5). As a shock to the author, 33.3% responded with *No* and 66.7% responded with *Yes*. While it should not come as a

shock to the author that people are not aware of various placements for interpreters, since it is actually the exact reason for the creation of this thesis, it still has.

This question was then followed by an open-ended question asking what factors might be considered when choosing a placement for interpreters. Participant #1 stated, “Ease of accommodation for the interpreters, effectiveness of the interpreters based on their input, creating a[n] enjoyable experience for all patrons”. Participant #2 stated, “Visibility to those needing interpreting and lack of interference with [the] staging of [a] play”. Finally, Participant #4 stated, “Viewing angles for those needing interpreting services, safe location for interpreters, [and] lighting for interpreters”. Comparing these statements to the comments the author has read and heard from various sources, the content of these statements seem to correlate with the information that is most commonly available. One thing that the author found interesting and thinks would be a good follow-up question (if the author were to expand on this thesis or questionnaire in the future), is in regards to Participant #2’s response. They responded *No* in the previous question about being aware of other options for placement of theatrical interpreters (see Figure 5). The author is curious if their open ended-response would change with more knowledge of shadow or zone interpreting or the idea of involving an interpreter on stage and in the blocking of a scene.

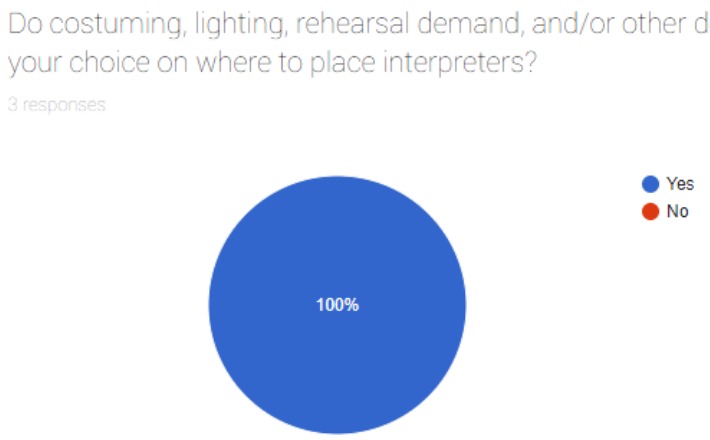

Figure 6: If technical aspects affect the decision of an interpreter’s placement for those in the Director/theater worker group.

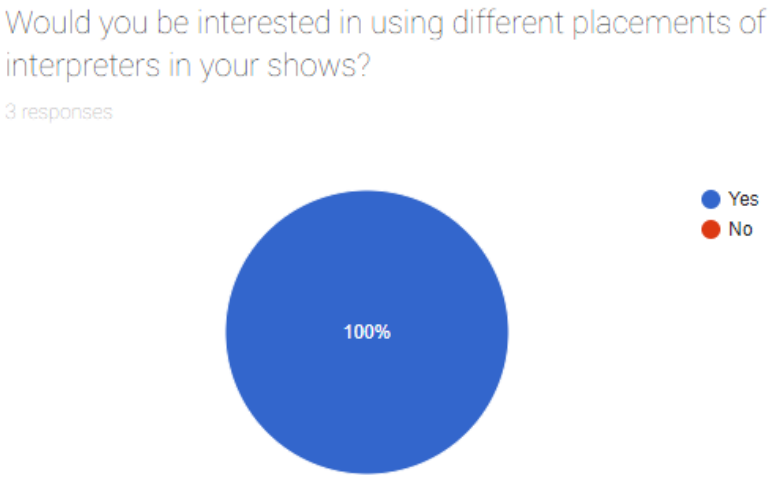

Figure 7: If those in the Director/Theater Worker group would be interested in using various interpreter placements.

The final few questions for the Director/Theatre Worker group focused on technical considerations and overall thoughts on various placements for interpreters. The first question was used to establish if technical aspects like costumes, lights, rehearsal demands, or others came into consideration when deciding on interpreter placement (see Figure 6). Unsurprisingly, 100% of the participants responded with *Yes*.

This is unsurprising as Directors and various members of a production team must take everything into consideration when producing a show, including things that could affect the budget. This question was then followed by an open-ended question asking how technical aspects were taken into consideration. Participant #1 stated, “Ability to be effective, visible, and maintain the need of the show”. Participant #2 stated, “Lighting is the most critical component, it can be adjusted once placement of interpreters is determined”. Participant #4 stated, “Not costuming that the author knows of. The ability to light interpreters is important. As is their location in relation to stage combat, moving scenery, etc.” One thing that the author found interesting is that none of the participants mentioned costuming as a factor, two of the participants even stated that they never considered it. This brings the author to wonder if the participants have heard of, or experienced a shadow or zone interpreted production in which interpreters were placed in costumes to better blend into the scenes.

The final two questions of this section were also *Yes/No* response followed by an open-ended prompted question. The first was to ask if the participants were interested in using different placements of theatrical interpreters in their shows (see Figure 7). There is a very gratifying response of 100% of the participants responding with *Yes*. The author hopes this thesis is able to spread awareness and eagerness to use various placement of interpreters into theatrical settings. The open-ended question asked the participants what factors or elements affect the rejection of different placements of an

interpreter (i.e. zone or shadow interpreting). Participant #1 stated, “If it is going to distract/harm the integrity of the performance”. Participant #2 states, “The placement would be dependent upon physical needs like visibility and lack of interference with staging. It would also be related to the director’s concept for the play and whether shadow interpreting could be effective”. Finally, Participant #4 stated, “Unsafe areas due to action or scenery, ability to light, ability to contain lighting/prevent unnecessary distraction. Actually, we haven’t often been presented with other options that [the participant] knows of, so it’s pretty rare that we’ve rejected anything”. Overall, the information and personal experience provided by the Director/Theatre Worker participants has created a wonderful insight into the knowledge and understanding of a theatre’s perspective on interpreting. While there are limitations to this research, including limited responses and time frame, the author still believes it is a start for the discussion of various interpreter placements.

Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Theater goers

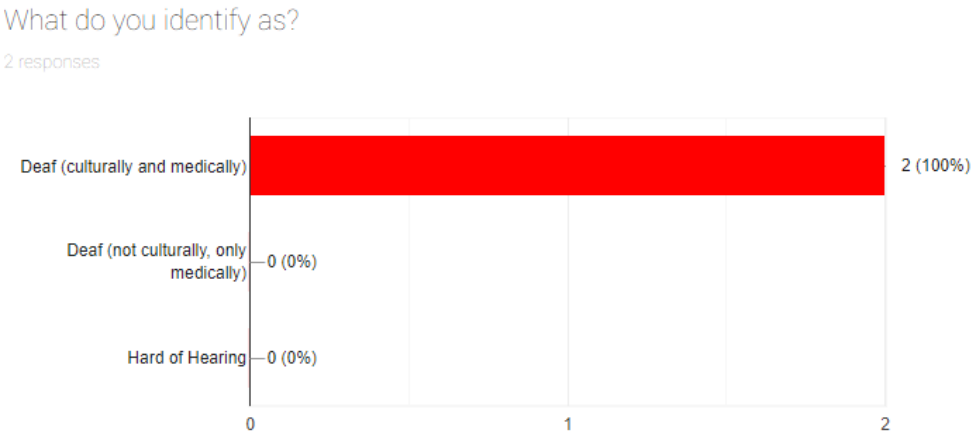

Figure 8: How Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theater goers identify.

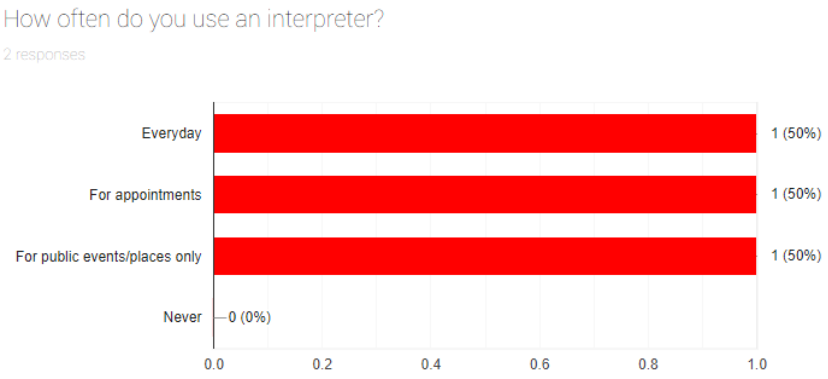

Figure 9: How often Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theater goers use interpreters.

The final few questions for the Director/Theatre Worker group focused on technical considerations and overall thoughts on various placements for interpreters. The first question was used to establish if technical aspects like costumes, lights, rehearsal demands, or others came into consideration when deciding on interpreter placement (see Figure 6). Unsurprisingly, 100% of the participants responded with *Yes*. This is unsurprising as Directors and various members of a production team must take everything into consideration when producing a show, including things that could affect the budget. This question was then followed by an open-ended question asking how technical aspects were taken into consideration. Participant #1 stated, “Ability to be effective, visible, and maintain the need of the show”. Participant #2 stated, “Lighting is the most critical component, it can be adjusted once placement of interpreters is determined”. Participant #4 stated, “Not costuming that the author knows of. The ability to light interpreters is important. As is their location in relation to stage combat, moving scenery, etc.” One thing that the author found interesting is that none of the

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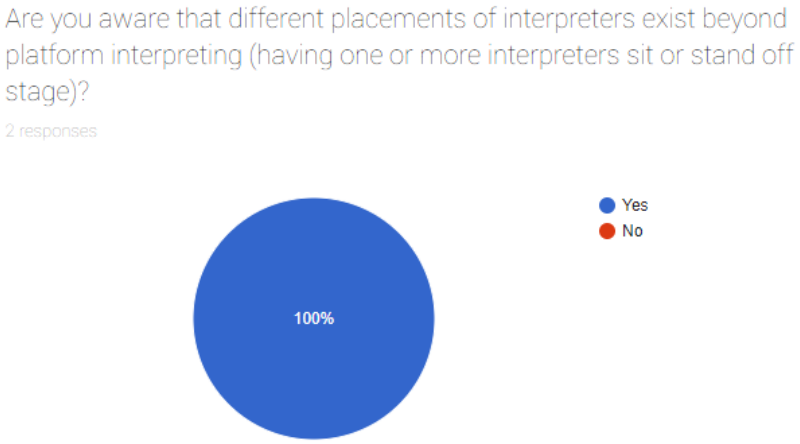

Figure 10: If Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theater goers are aware of various interpreter placement beyond platform.

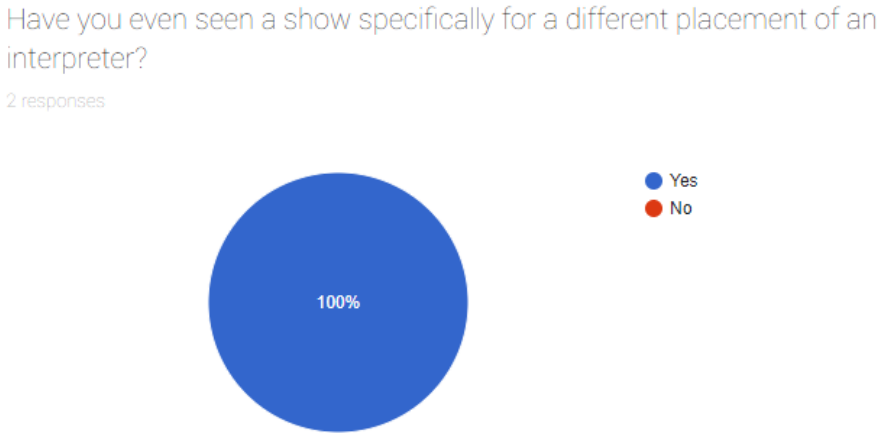

Figure 11: If Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theater goers have ever seen a show because of the interpreter being in a different placement.

The next few questions began to look at the participant’s personal experience. The first question asking if the participant was aware of various interpreter placements

beyond the common placement of platform interpreting (see Figure 10). Out of the *Yes* or *No* options, 100% of the participants responded with *Yes,* which is different from the Director/Theatre Worker group. This correlated with the author’s predictions due to the idea that theatre workers are involved in the interpreting process but are not dependent on it for a production. The follow-up question asked if the participants have attended a show specifically for an interpreting placement (see Figure 11). Out of the *Yes* and *No* options a surprisingly 100% of the participants responded with *Yes*. This question was then followed by an open-ended question with the prompt, “if yes what placement?” Participant #3 responded with, “The interpreter was [placed] right in front of the stage in front of me so I can just look up and see everything at the same time”. Participant #5 responded with “On stage next to the actors or backstage for communication needs”. While Participant #3’s response sounds like a platform interpreting placement, it does sound modified so that the “ping-pong” effect was limited, or eradicated. Whereas Participant #5’s response could be either shadow or zone interpreting.

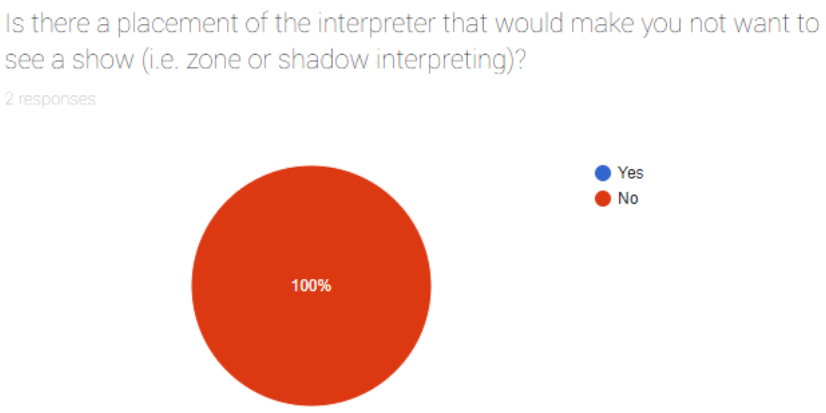

Figure 12: If there is an interpreter placement that would influence whether or not the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theater goers sees a show.

The final three questions for the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theatregoers consisted of 1 *Yes* or *No* question and two open ended questions. The final *Yes/No* question (see Figure 12), asked the participants if they would avoid going to a show due to interpreter placement. The response was that 100% of the participants said “*No”*. This is a contradicting representation to the idea that some Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theatregoers do not like certain interpreting placements and can find them distracting. However, it must be stated that there are those in the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theatre goers community who will not see a show due to interpreter placement and that the information given in this thesis is just the ideas and personal experiences of only a few members of different communities. The next question was a follow-up question to the *Yes/No* which asked, as an open-ended question, “if yes, what placement and why?” Although both participants had responded with *No* in the previous question Participant #5 included a response to this question stating, “I love the variety of

placements...diversity of acting too”. The final question in the questionnaire was another open-ended question asking, what is [their] opinion on the “ping-pong” effect? Participant #3 stated, “Tiring and I sometimes missed what’s going on stage or what the interpreter said”. Participant #5 stated, “It can be tough… I do not go and enjoy plays as much because of this. It can be difficult to follow on who is saying what. But some plays are effective using the ping pong effect… just not all plays are effective”.

Overall, with the limitations of this questionnaire, the results and statements above are not a full representation of the ideas and experiences of the groups of which they identify with. That being said, however, they are included in this thesis to bring a better understand and different perspectives on a topic that affects many people from many different professions. If this thesis were to be done again or expanded upon, further questioning and questioning of a variety of people within these groups might bring about a better representation of the overall ideas and experiences of placements of theatrical interpreters. That said, the insight and ideas from those who did participate are greatly appreciated.

Findings

This thesis is a compilation of both a literature review and a questionnaire to support the evidence that was found in the literature. It was also used to discover personal experience and ideas on the subject of interpreter placement. The

understandings from the literature review will be examined first, then the information provided by the participants from the questionnaire.

When looking at interpreter locations there are many disadvantages and advantages to each. If the interpreter is positioned as a platform interpreter there is more likely to be a “ping-pong” effect (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Richardson, 2017). The “ping-pong” effect causes this location to be a disadvantage to the Deaf audience. On the other hand, this location is advantageous to the hearing audience because it separates the interpreter from the audience. If the interpreter is placed in a zone position there is less of a “ping-pong” effect (though it is still possible), however, this could result in an unclear representation of who is speaking at what time (Gebron, 2000; Richardson, 2017). Zone interpreting does allow the Deaf audience a better understanding of what is said as well as the action that is being done by the actors. However, this can create more distraction for the Hearing audience. If the interpreter is placed as a shadow, there is a minimum risk of “ping-pong” effect but there is a risk of losing who is talking at what time, or the stage becoming too crowded, which can result in a difficult time following the show (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Richardson, 2017).

Each interpreter placement in the theatre has a varying effect on rehearsal, prep-work and cost. With platform interpreting, the theatre has very little pre-show work to do. The theatre hires one, two, or three interpreters, provides them with a script, and

allows the interpreters to attend a few rehearsals or shows before the day of the interpreted show. Additionally, they provide a designated area for the interpreter to be located during the show as well as a designated seating area for Deaf audience. This is done to provide sight lines to both the interpreter and the stage, and provides appropriate lighting for the interpreter (Frishberg, 1990; Ganz Horwitz, 2014; Gebron, 2000; Graham & Pollitt, 2002; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Richardson, 2017). For zone interpreting, there is some extra work required for the theatre company. In addition to the hiring of interpreters and providing a script, from either the Theatre Company, director, or stage manager, blocking notes are also to be provided to interpreters to know where characters are throughout the show. They also provide extra rehearsal time when the interpreters can practice their translation while on stage with the actors as they go through their blocking (Gebron, 2000). The interpreters must also have an area available to them on the stage where they can be seen without set pieces obscuring the sightlines for the interpreters. Additionally, the interpreters must have appropriate lighting, and possibly have costumes made (Brewer, 2002; Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Graham & Pollitt, 2002; Richardson, 2017). Shadow interpreting is similar to zone interpreting but even more pre-work for the theatre is needed. Interpreters need more time with the cast for blocking because the interpreters will be side by side with the cast the whole show, and the interpreters may need appropriate costumes

made (Baker-Gibbs, 2014; Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Graham & Pollitt, 2002; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Richardson, 2017).

Finally, the different placements affect the interpreter's prep-work depending on how much time is needed for interacting with the theatre company. For platform interpreting most of the major prep-work is the interpreter's responsibility because all that is really needed is a translation of the script and the attendance of a few performances to match timing and knowing when to throw focus to the stage (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Graham & Pollitt, 2002; Granz Horwitz, 2014; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Rocks, 2011). The interpreter's prep-work for zone interpretation, in addition to a script translation and matching timing with the other interpreter, will need to determine how to split lines according to blocking. This will mean knowing blocking notes and possibly attending a few extra rehearsals to become more familiar with characters and their locations on stage (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Graham & Pollitt, 2002; Richardson, 2017). Shadow interpreting requires many hours of prep-work for interpreters. This location also requires many hours of prep-work for the theatre company. In addition to script translation and knowing blocking, an interpreter should become more familiar with the character and actor, be fitted for a (costume if the director decides they want the interpreters in costumes instead of the normal attire of all black), and attend many, if not all, rehearsals just as the assigned

actor would (Baker-Gibbs, 2014; Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Graham & Pollitt, 2002; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Richardson, 2017).

The information provided by the participants from the questionnaire gave new insight into the ideas and understandings of both the Deaf audience and the director. As there were very few responses, this information is taken as support to the researched information and provide new ideas from personal experience. The first section of the questionnaire showed that all of the participants were from the West Coast of the United States (see Figure 2), this can create a limitation due to the responses being from a localized area in which ideas are commonly shared. If there were more variety of locations this might have changed the percentages. According to the age results (see Figure 1), a majority of participants were over the age of 40 with some being 30-40. One of the reasons for including this section was to identify if being from a certain age group could affect the awareness of various interpreter placements or the reluctance or non-reluctance to changing interpreter placements. According to the information provided, there is no visible correlation between age and awareness of placements or willingness to try new placements.

The section directed toward Directors/Theatre Workers included three of the participants (see Figure 3) and showed that there is an imbalance of representation when comparing the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theatregoers and the Director/Theatre Worker community. This mirrors the imbalance of representation of Deaf/Hard of

Hearing community in the United States. According to Figure 4, all of the participants have been involved in theatre for over 40 years, this is showing that each participant has had many years of experience and many years that they might have been exposed to interpreting placements in theatres. However, in Figure 5, it shows that while 66.7% are aware of various placements 33.3% were not aware.

When questioned about factors that affect interpreter placement all the participants agreed that costume, lighting, and rehearsal demands do factor into decisions (see Figure 6). Some others that were listed included ease of accommodation, visibility, lack of interference, safety, and enjoyment for all. These results show that directors often must take many things into consideration when discussing interpreter placements. This also shows that the directors/theatre workers are not only thinking about cost but also considering audience perspectives, safety the wellbeing of the interpreters and actors. However, 100% of the participants were interesting in integrating and using other interpreter placements in their shows (see Figure 7). While not everyone was aware of various locations (see Figure 5), all of the participants would be willing to try new ideas and locations.

The final section of the questionnaire was the results of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theatregoers. The participants in this section were fewer than that of the Director/Theatre Worker (see Figure 3). The first two questions (see Figure 8 and 9) were used to determine the familiarity of the participants with interpreters and the

Deaf community. As both participants stated that they identify as Deaf, both culturally and medically, and both participants are familiar and use interpreters often, it can be concluded that the participants are a good representative of the audience group this thesis is written for.

When asked about the participant’s familiarity with different interpreter placements, and willingness and opinions on shows using different placements (see Figure 10, 11, and 12), 100% said they there aware of placements and have seen a show because it had a non-platform placement. When prompted with an open-ended question, the participants stated that they have seen a platform interpretation which had been modified so that the interpreter was directly in front of the Deaf audience or that the interpreter had be located near the cast. Furthermore, when asked if there was an interpreter placement that would influence the participant not to see a show, 100% stated that there was none. Although some hearing audience members might be affected by interpreter placement, the conclusion was that it does not negatively influence the Deaf audience much (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Richardson, 2017). This information showed that although platform interpreting is a common placement, it is not always the only option or even the preferred option for those who are Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing theatregoers. Finally, both participants expressed discontent and dislike of the need to look between the interpreter and the action when prompted about the effects of the “ping-pong” effect both. In contrast, one participant

did state that they have experienced shows in which the “ping-pong” effect has been minimized effectively.

In summary, the information provided by the literature review and the information provided by the participants of the questionnaire concludes that although there are many different interpreting placements available, not all theatres are able to implement them. Likewise, there is still a lack of awareness for directors/theatre workers on the advantages and disadvantages of various interpreter placements with respect to both technical aspects, cost, and enjoyment of the show for all audience members.

Conclusion/Recommendations

From the data collected, it can be assured that each style of interpretation for theatre has its own advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, the location of the interpreter will affect the Deaf audience’s experience at the theatre as well as the Hearing audience’s experience. Just as every show a theatre company puts on is different, so too will be each interpretation be different. There are several things to be aware of when choosing what interpreter placement should be for a show. It is always goods to be aware of why interpretation is being added. Is it to provide access for access night? Is it an artistic choice to add more meaning or more depth and definition to a show or character? Or is the addition of ASL incorporated into a show to make a statement? When the reason for adding an interpretation is known, it is clearer which

interpreter position will work the best. Another thing to consider is the theatre company’s ability with respect to resources, time, and money. A platform positioned interpreter creates less strain on the Theatre Company and budget than a shadow or zone interpretation position.

Through the analysis of many different articles, books, blogs, and surveys, the author has found that there is not one perfect way to interpret a theatrical production. There are many different styles that can be used and each style has its own advantages and disadvantages to not only the audience members, but to the theatre company, the production team, and the interpreters themselves. Additionally, there are many forms of access used for theatre productions which are not included in what the author has included in this research. These include SimCom, closed captions, ProTactile and Tactile interpretation for DeafBlind theatre audience members, and many others. There are many different aspects that must be taken into consideration that can affect an interpretation. Beyond translating a script, an interpreter and the theatre want to provide an equal experience to all audience members which include concepts conveyed through the director’s decisions with blocking and other deliberate choices made by the design team. The author believes it is important for theatre companies to be aware of the different styles of interpretation available for theatre and the advantages and disadvantages of each. The author thinks it is also important for interpreters to know that theatrical interpretation is not like other interpreting jobs but is a form of

performance of itself. Knowing this, interpreters might take more time preparing their interpretation of shows and knowledge of theatre itself (Gebron, 2000; Rocks, 2011). Double casting and casting a Deaf actor or actress are always an option as well. These are wonderful ways to expand the diversity in theatre and a new culture. Casting a Deaf actor and or possibly double casting a hearing actor to provide the voice of the character, can add cost to a production due to the need for an interpreter for all rehearsals as well as interpreters for show nights.

This study is limited due to the lack of research in the professional field of interpretation, especially those which specialize in theatrical performances. More research into different styles of interpretation themselves, as well as the effects of different styles on the audience, production team, and interpreters, would be beneficial to the field of sign language interpretation and future research. On top of more research in the field of interpreting, more research involving Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing community members and those who are involved in theatre might provide more insight and awareness. If this study or a similar study were to be conducted again, more involvement from these communities would provide better insight, as well as the possibility to include interpreters. Lastly, it is important to remember that theatre is for the enjoyment of all, no matter the age, background, or sex. As Cohen (2014) states “theatre is at once a showcase and a forum, a medium through which a society displays its ideas, fashions, moralities, and entertainments, and debated its conflicts, dilemmas,

earnings, and struggles” (p. 3). “The theatre shows us, and *is* us, in all of our living complexity” (p. 4). With Cohen’s words in mind, should we not strive to provide the best experience for all?

Handbook Guide for Directors and Theater Companies of Interpreter Placements

A quick summary and guide to various interpreting placements for theatre interpretation for signed languages. This will examine the advantages and disadvantages of three main interpreting placements in American; platform, zone, and shadow (Baker-Gibbs, 2014; Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007) for both theatre companies/directors as well as the effects on Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing and hearing audiences. This summary is focused on the topics discussed in this thesis for the education and familiarization for those who are directors and theatre workers. The idea of this summarization is to provide a type of handbook that can be provided to theatres. Placements that are not included in this summary but worth mentioning for the possibility of further research are; SimCom, sightline, Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing actor, double cast, and double staged (Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Richardson, 2017).

Platform interpreting

This interpreting placement finds the interpreter or interpreters placed in a solitary location off-stage either sitting or standing (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000).

Benefits. This placement is the least intrusive to the action that is occurring on stage and easiest to implement in a short time (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000). This placement creates less distraction for the hearing audience members and the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing audience members are familiar with this placement, as it is the most common (Baker-Gibbs, 2014). This placement is also the cheapest and easiest form to implement as it does not require many hours for the interpreter(s) to be involved. It also does not affect the blocking or staging of the show. Interpreter often only require the script, the ability to attend a few rehearsals or possibly shows (Gebron, 2000; Granz Horwitz, 2014; Turner & Pollitt, 2002). As for technical aspects, the main accommodation for this style of interpretation would include chairs or possibly stools for the interpreters unless they are to stand. Lighting is the only other aspect that must be taken into consideration, with the additional hang of a lighting fixture to provide light for the interpreters (Gebron, 2000).

Disadvantages. One main disadvantage of this placement of interpreters is that it can create a “ping-pong” effect for the Deaf audience as a result of looking back and forth between stage action and plot provided by the interpreters (Gebron, 2000; Granz Horwitz, 2014; Rocks, 2011). This can result in unsatisfied audience members. Possible ways to counteract or minimalize this effect could be to bring the interpreter closer to the action if there is an unused or out of the way area of the stage that would still provide appropriate sightlines for the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing audience. Moreover, if this

placement is used in a Black-box theatre, Arena, or possibly a Thrust stage, providing a designated seating area for Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing audience members to sit and placing the interpreter(s) directly in front of that section between the seats and stage might also be beneficial.

In regards to technical aspects, platform interpreting might require an additional light hung and programmed into cue lists for interpreted nights (Gebron, 2000). For good measure, the theater company should always be prepared to possibly offer discounted or complimentary tickets to interpreters for the night of the performance or any other show night that they might use to practice their translations and become familiar with the show and important plot or technical aspects (Gevron, 2000; Granz Horwitz, 2014; Turner & Pollitt, 2002).

Zone Interpreting

Zone interpreting is a placement in which the interpreter or interpreters are placed in one location of the stage. Commonly these include far stage-right, far stage-left, or far up-stage in order to stay out of the clocking for the actors but to be placed in a more central location in correlation to the action happening on stage (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000).

Benefits. Some advantages to the Deaf audience with this placement include the minimization of the “ping-pong” effect due to the close proximity of the action and plot provided by the actors and interpreters respectively (Frishberg, 1990). Moreover, the

Deaf audience could enjoy the show more due to the close proximity of the interpreters to the action (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). In regards to the technical aspects, the need to hang additional lighting might not be needed as the interpreters would be placed on the stage and could be included in the original light plot and focus.

Disadvantages. Some disadvantages to this placement include the possibility of being more distracting for the hearing audience due to the interpretation being done closer to the action (Frishberg, 1990; Rocks, 2011). Further, as the nature of zone interpreting is for the interpreters to interpret the spoken words of the actor in their “zone” it can create some confusion if actors are continuously moving zones (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Gebron, 2000). When looking at technical aspects, zone interpreting could be more costly due to the interpreter’s needing to attend more rehearsals to be aware of which actors and lines are in their zone (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Granz Horwitz, 2014). Additional lighting might be required to hang if interpreters are in a location that was not previously included in the original light plot (Gebron, 2000). One final aspect to consider is whether to costume the interpreters or not due to their location on stage. This would add additional cost (Brewer, 2002; Calhoun et al., 2015; Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000).

Shadow Interpreting

This interpreting style involves one or more interpreter shadowing actors throughout the whole show and doing everything their actor does (Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007).

Benefits. Some of the benefits that can be seen are close proximity between interpreters and actors. This allows for ease of understanding and enjoyment for those of the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing audience members. It also allows Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing audience members to view the show in as a whole and as the designers and directors envisioned for the production. This placement of interpreters can incorporate ASL as another feature or layer to the show, to create a statement or incorporate a concept. This placement does not require additional lights to be added to a pre-existing light plot (Gebron, 2000).

Disadvantages. There are a few more drawbacks for this placement than the others. The most important being that this could cost the theatre company more money in terms of interpreter fees. As this placement is the most inclusive for interpreters into a production it is most likely that the interpreters will need to attend many, if not all, rehearsals (Brewer, 2002; Calhoun, et al., 2015; Frishberg, 1990; Gebron, 2000). Additionally, with the involvement of an interpreter on stage in close proximity to the action occurring for the scene, there could be a consideration of costuming the interpreter to allow them to blend into a scene easily. Aside from technical and cost considerations, this style could cause more distraction for the hearing

audience, especially depending on how the interpreter is incorporated into the scene. It could create some confusion to the Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing audience as well, if they are unable to follow who is talking at any given moment (Gebron, 2000; Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007).

In Conclusion

As stated above, all interpreter placements have their own advantages and disadvantages depending on budget, time constraint, the desire of incorporating a different language, or even the simple constraint of what theatre format the stage is, and what the set allows for. The placements stated above are not the only placements available, there are many other options. The concept of this thesis and summary is to provide a basic summary and to start the ideas and discussion as well as bring awareness to the access of theatre to all people.

Appendix A

Survey Questions and Responses

Section 1

Questions	*Responses*	*Possible Answers*	*Responses*
How old are you?	5/5	Under 18 18-24 25-29 30-35 36-40 Over 40	0 0 0 1 1 3
Where are you?	5/5	Outside of the USA Northeast Mideast South Midwest West Hawaii Alaska Other	0 0 0 0 0 5 0 0 0
Which are you?	5/5	Director/Work in theater Deaf/Hard of Hearing Theater Goer	3 2

Section 2: Director/Work in Theater

Questions	*Responses*	*Possible Answers*	*Responses*
How long have you been involved in theater?	3/5	0-5 Years 6-10 Years 11-15 Years	0 0 0

		16-20 Years Over 20 Years	0 3
Are you aware that different placements for theatrical interpreters are available beyond platform interpreting (having one or more interpreters sit or stand off stage)?	3/5	Yes No	2 1
What are factors that you take into account when choosing an interpreter placement?	3/5	*(open ended)*	
Do costuming, lighting, rehearsal demand, and/or other demand affect your choice on where to place interpreters?	3/5	Yes No	3 0
If so, how?	3/5	*(open ended)*	
Would you be interesting in using different placements of theatrical interpreters in your shows?	3/5	Yes No	3 0
What factors or elements affect the rejection of different placements of an interpreter (i.e. zone or shadow interpreting)?	3/5	*(open ended)*	

Section 3: Deaf/Hard of Hearing Theater Goer

Questions	*Responses*	*Possible Answers*	*Responses*
What do you identify as?	2/5	Deaf (culturally and medically) Deaf (not culturally, only medically) Hard of Hearing	2 0 0

How often do you use an interpreter?*	2/5	Everyday For appointments For public events/places only Never	1 1 1 0
Are you aware that different placements of interpreters exist beyond platform interpreting (having one or more interpreters sit or stand off stage)?	2/5	Yes No	2 0
Have you ever seen a show specifically for a different placement of an interpreter?	2/5	Yes No	2 0
If yes, what placement?	2/5	*(open ended)*	
Is there a placement of the interpreter that would make you not want to see a show (i.e. zone or shadow interpreting)?	2/5	Yes No	0 2
If yes, what placement and why?	1/5	*(open ended)*	
What is your opinion on what has been called the "ping-pong" effect? Trying to look between the performance put on by the actors and the plot provided by the interpreters?	2/5	*(open ended)*	

*participants were able to respond to more than one possible answer.

Appendix B

Notes from viewing Seattle’s 5th Avenue Theatre’s production of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame.* The show ran June 1st-24th, 2018, the author went to the production Wednesday, June 13th, 2018. These notes were written as my experience and thoughts on the production and use of sign language. These notes were written a few hours after the performance ended, once the author returned home but might not be 100% correct. The production the author went to see was not an interpreted production so the only signing done during the show was done by the actors themselves.

- Mr. Castile (Deaf actor) did three styles of communication, spoken (with hearing aids because he has some hearing), SimCom, and only sign
- The “interpreting” was done by a cast member E.J. Cardona who is listed in the Playbill as casted as the voice of Quasimodo and Ensemble/Gargoyle. In addition to his role as a gargoyle he sang any songs that were to be sung by Quasimodo while Mr. Castile, who was casted as Quasimodo, signed them.
- SimCom was used by the gargoyles while speaking to Quasimodo and Quasimodo used SimCom when he was alone with the gargoyles. Quasimodo spoke when he was with any other cast member* (with one exception, see note below). Quasimodo used sign language only in songs and when he was “by himself” *Mr. Castile and his voice actor/gargoyles had a conversation by themselves in which Mr. Castile signed and the gargoyle replied in English

- SimCom was also used with the gargoyles when Esmeralda, played by Dan’yelle Williamson, was present in the second act because Quasimodo felt comfortable with her there.
- The song “Flight into Egypt” was performed in sign by Mr. Castile, spoken by E.J. in spoken English as Quasimodo’s voice. Also done in SimCom by the gargoyles (including E.J. using SimCom when he wasn’t voicing for Mr. Castile as Quasimodo) and by the actor who played Saint Aphrodisus, played by Aaron Shanks.
- The final song in the show was performed in SimCom by the entire cast (Mr. Castile used sign only and his voice actor was singing as ensemble).
- According to a choir cast member who the author was talking with on the Light Rail out of Seattle, Mr. Castile has interpreters backstage during performances to help with stage directions and other things. There were also interpreters during rehearsal. After bows were finished a cast member addressed the audience, during this time one interpreter came on stage to interpret into ASL for Mr. Castile.

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